



FOR PROFESSIONALS
SINCE 1941

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS CONCERNED ABOUT NHI

The National Budget Speech next week is expected to reveal further details on Government's proposed roll-out of the National Health Insurance (NHI) initiative, yet South Africa's medical profession remains divided on whether this is the correct route to take, according to a new survey released by PPS.

The survey of almost 700 medical professionals, which was conducted earlier this month, found that 62% of those working in the public sector agreed with the principle behind the scheme, while only 57% in the private sector felt the same.

When asked whether NHI is the correct solution to fixing the ailing public health service, the figures were even more alarming. Only 23% of respondents working in the public sector agreed, while 14% of those in the private sector said it was the right solution.

Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, says that while Government-employed medical professionals have slightly more optimism than those in the private sector, both segments still have concerns about the implementation of NHI. "There is a general assumption that medical professionals in the private sector have more misgivings about NHI than those in the public, however, it is clear that both groups still have serious misgivings."

Earlier this month, the SA Medical Association warned that the NHI scheme could collapse if it is implemented now, as the health system is already overwhelmed by decaying resources, noting that the public sector needs fewer managers and more people who can fix problems such as in-house electricians and plumbers.

Joubert says the continued concerns that are being raised about the NHI scheme show that far greater dialogue needs to be opened between Government and the medical sector – both private and public – in order to find a workable solution. "It is commonly accepted that the public healthcare system is in serious need of an overhaul and that something needs to be done about the fact that the vast majority of the population do not have access to adequate healthcare; but this must be done with buy-in from those working within the industry."

Further figures released from the survey showed that those working in the public sector have a confidence level of just 47% in the future of the healthcare system over the next five years. This drops to a confidence level of just 41% for those working in the private sector.

"There is clearly more optimism among professionals in the public sector than the private but in reality, neither group has demonstrated huge levels of optimism about these plans. Government has committed to spending R255 billion to the NHI project by 2025, yet those actually working in the industry remain unconvinced."

Elsewhere, the survey also showed that confidence in their ability to earn a sufficient income should NHI be implemented was recorded at 60% for those in the public sector and just 50% for those in the private sector.

He says it is critical, particularly since President Jacob Zuma confirmed in his State of the Nation address that an NHI fund would be set up in 2014, the same time as the insurance programme is expected to launch nationally, that such concerns are taken seriously.

Commenting on the results of the survey, Professor Alex Van Den Heever, Chair of Social Security at the University of the Witwatersrand Graduate School of Public and Development Management, says: "When many of the failures of the public health system are systemic, it is furthermore unclear which systemic problems a "fund" is meant to address and what it's meant to do. Particularly as the public health budget is already a "fund" annually allocated by a Parliament."

"Given the absence of any concrete proposals, including those regarding governance of such a fund, questions remain as to whether it will have any proper purpose," says Professor van den Heever

"Universal coverage is a worthwhile objective and the medical profession clearly supports the principles behind its achievements but the priorities identified by the people working in the industry is to fix the problems in state services first," concludes Joubert.